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Kavanagh

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THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

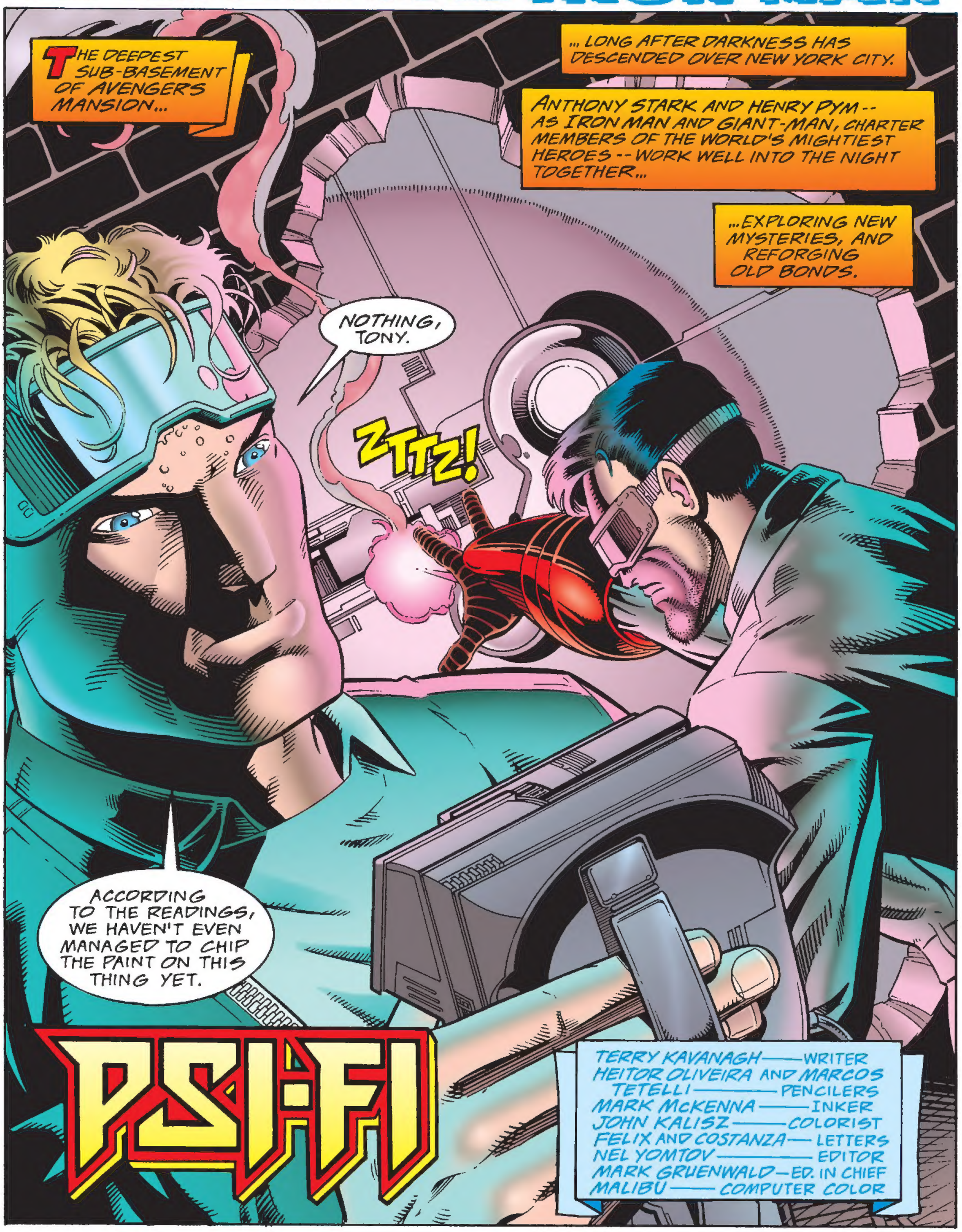
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

ALEX MALEEV

MARK MCKENNA

WHEN MULTI-BILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK, INVENTOR EXTRAORDINAIRE, DONS HIS SOLAR-CHARGED, STEEL-MESH ARMOR, HE BECOMES A HIGH-TECH WARRIOR—THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN


THE DEEPEST SUB-BASEMENT OF AVENGERS MANSION...
...LONG AFTER DARKNESS HAS DESCENDED OVER NEW YORK CITY.
ANTHONY STARK AND HENRY PYM -- AS IRON MAN AND GIANT-MAN, CHARTER MEMBERS OF THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST HEROES -- WORK WELL INTO THE NIGHT TOGETHER...
...EXPLORING NEW MYSTERIES, AND REFORGING OLD BONDS.
NOTHING, TONY.
ZTTZ!
ACCORDING TO THE READINGS, WE HAVEN'T EVEN MANAGED TO CHIP THE PAINT ON THIS THING YET.
PSI-FI
TERRY KAVANAGH——WRITER
HEITOR OLIVEIRA AND MARCOS TETELLI——PENCILERS
MARK MCKENNA——INKER
JOHN KALISZ——COLORIST
FELIX AND COSTANZA—LETTERS
NEL YOMTOV——EDITOR
MARK GRUENWALD—ED. IN CHIEF
MALIBU——COMPUTER COLOR

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OKAY, WE'VE ELIMINATED LASERS, SONICS, AND DIRECT FORCE AS POSSIBLE MEANS OF PENETRATING THE DOOR SO FAR.

MAYBE IT WOULD BE BEST TO REVIEW WHAT WE DO KNOW AT THIS POINT, HANK.

NEXT TO NOTHING.

IT WASN'T UNTIL THE COMPOUND WAS DESTROYED BY SERSI -- AND THE MANSION RESTORED AGAIN BY THE WATCHER* -- THAT WE EVEN DISCOVERED THE EXISTENCE OF THIS DOOR...

...AND THE BIZARRE TECHNO-METALLICS HAVE RESISTED ANY AND ALL ATTEMPTS AT INVESTIGATION SINCE THEN.

WE'D ALL BUT GIVEN UP BELIEVING IT COULD BE OPENED AT ALL...

UNTIL THE PARTY LAST WEEK.

MY PARTY.

KRAKA-

BOOM

* IN THE ALREADY-CLASSIC AVENGERS #375. -- NEL

"NOW WE'RE LOOKING AT THREE OF OUR OWN DEAD -- MURDERED* -- IN THE SANCTUARY OF THEIR OWN HOME..."

* AVENGERS: THE CROSSING and AVENGERS #391. -- NEL

...AND THE VISION WATCHED GILGAMESH'S KILLER, AT LEAST, ESCAPE THROUGH THIS DAMNED DOOR.

NO EFFECT FROM THE MAGNETI-BEAM EITHER.

BUT I REALLY WISH YOU'D BACK OFF A LITTLE, TONY.

VRRM

REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED TO DEATHCRY WHEN THE DOOR ACTED TO DEFEND ITSELF... *

WE HAVE NO CHOICE ANYMORE, HANK.

I'M MORE THAN WILLING TO TAKE WHATEVER RISKS NECESSARY TO PROTECT THE SANCTITY OF THE MANSION--THIS HOUSE I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN.

"AND BESIDES, THE WIDOW ORDERED THE REST OF THE PREMISES EVACUATED...

"...SO WE'RE NOT ENDANGERING ANYONE BUT OURSELVES."

KRAK

*AVENGERS #385. --NEL

TZZT

NOTHING.

CRYONICS AND ACIDS.

NADA.

HSSs

NOTHING LEFT, HANK...

TRY A COMBINATION OF ELECTRO-PULSES AND HEAT PRESSURE.

...BUT THE BIG GUNS!

FWOOM

BRINGING THE LAB'S *ENTIRE* SENSOR-ARRAY TO BEAR ON THIS ONE, BUDDY--AND YOUR REPULSORS ARE REGISTERING RIGHT *OFF* THE SCALE--

--WITHOUT MAKING A SCRATCH.

MIGHT BE BETTER TO TAKE A LATERAL APPROACH FROM HERE; START SEARCHING AROUND FOR WHATEVER IT IS WE MUST HAVE...

--BUT HE'S TRYING TO HIDE HIS PAIN, AS USUAL.

I'M READY TO PACK IT IN AND CALL IT A NIGHT, DOC...

NNG

...MISSED.

...SOON AS I UNCOUPLE THIS SECONDARY SECURITY MONITOR FOR A LAB INSPECTION LATER.

SOMETHING'S WRONG-- ALMOST AS IF HANK'S HAVING TROUBLE SHRINKING BACK DOWN TO NORMAL SIZE AGAIN--

BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO SOME CATCHING-UP TIME, TONY...

...IT'S BEEN SO LONG.

TOO LONG.

BUT YOU SEEM SOMEWHAT DISTRACTED, HANK.

DIVORCE HAS NEVER BEEN BETTER, PAL.

SOUNDS TO ME LIKE YOU'RE JUST ANGLING FOR ANOTHER SHOT AT MY EX.

NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, SHE DOES PREFER THE BRAINY TYPE.

AND SHE DID HAVE A CRUSH ON ME ONCE UPON A TIME, OLD MAN...

LOOK WHO'S TALKING, MR. BIG-SHOT. THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO -- FOR ALL OF FIVE MINUTES --

--AND SHE'S GROWN A LOT SINCE THEN. PROBABLY MORE THAN THE REST OF US COMBINED.

BUT WE DO HAVE QUITE A HISTORY TOGETHER, DON'T WE...?

AND I WOULD, TONY. HONESTLY.

IT'S JUST A SLIGHT HEAD-ACHE. HARDLY EVEN A PRESSURE, REALLY--

KRAKA-BOOM!

IS EVERY-THING ALL RIGHT LATELY? IT'S NOT MORE PROBLEMS BETWEEN YOU AND JAN AGAIN, IS IT...?

THAT'S WHY I'M HOPING YOU'LL OPEN UP, TELL ME IF ANYTHING'S BOTHERING YOU...

--MORE LIKE A SUBTLE TAPPING...

THREE THOUSAND MILES WEST, THE SUN HAS JUST BEGUN TO SET...

...AS A STARK ENTERPRISES JET FINALLY TOUCHES DOWN AT LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

HAVING CROSSED THE VAST EXPANSE OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN--FROM THE BUSTLING PORT CITY OF HONG KONG TO THE COAST OF CALIFORNIA--IN JUST UNDER FOUR HOURS...

...ITS SOLE PASSENGER DISEMBARKS FROM THE SLEEK AND SILENT CRAFT, PAUSING ONLY FOR A MOMENT TO ABSORB HER SURROUND-INGS.

AND, SURPRISINGLY, SUZIE ENDO SMILES AT WHAT SHE'S FOUND HERE.

SHE INHALES DEEPLY, TASTING THE AIR OF HER NEW HOME ON HER LIPS, SAVORING THE LANDSCAPE WITH HER EYES.

THEN IT'S BACK TO BUSINESS.

I'VE LANDED.

WELCOME, MS. ENDO.

I'M TRULY SORRY I COULDN'T BE THERE TO GREET YOU PERSONALLY...

...BUT I GOT CAUGHT UP WITH SOME LOOSE ENDS HERE ON THE EAST COAST.

IF YOU'D BE SO KIND AS TO SETTLE IN AT THE HOTEL SUITE MY STAFF HAS ARRANGED FOR YOU...

"...I'LL JOIN YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE."

...THE ADVENTURE HAS JUST BEGUN.

LOOKING FORWARD TO IT, MR. STARK.

I HAVE THE STRANGEST FEELING...

AND CLOSER IN EVERY WAY THAN YOUNG SUZIE ENDO COULD POSSIBLY SUSPECT--

--A SHADOWED WOMAN STIFLES A COLD LAUGH...

A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY IN VENTURA, A FEW SECONDS LATER...

...THE FORCE WORKS COMPOUND, GATHERING PLACE FOR A UNIQUE FELLOWSHIP OF CHAMPIONS--

--RECEIVES A PRIVATE COMMUNICATION FROM THEIR **FOUNDER** AND SPONSOR.

I WAS HOPING TO SPEAK TO WANDA DIRECTLY ABOUT THIS, **MOONRAKER.**

BUT I'M JUST CALLING TO LET YOU KNOW I'LL BE ARRIVING BY THIS TIME TOMORROW...

...AND I'D APPRECIATE IF YOU'D GATHER THE *OTHERS.* THERE'S SOMEONE I'D LIKE YOU ALL TO MEET.

WHY THE SUSPENSE, TONY? WHO ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT...?

IF YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TELL US--

I'D MUCH PREFER IF WE WAIT UNTIL I CAN BE THERE IN PERSON, *MOONRAKER.*

WHATEVER YOU SAY, FRIEND.

UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, I THINK IT MIGHT BE *EASIEST* ON EVERYONE THAT WAY.

BUT THE WITCH WON'T LIKE THIS...

EXACTLY WHAT I'M AFRAID OF.

KLIK

JUST ONE MORE CALL TO THE *VAN DYNE ESTATE* IN SOUTHAMPTON BEFORE I--

WHAT HO, ANTHONY!?

A PLEASURE TO SEE YOU AGAIN, TRULY.

TEK

IT HAS BEEN FAR *TOO LONG* SINCE WE'VE SPOKEN, YOU AND I. TAKEN A *MOMENT* ALONE TO SHARE TALES OF OUR EXPLOITS, WITH COMRADES OLD AND NEW...

YOU GOT THAT RIGHT, *HERCULES*-- AND IF I KNOW YOU, THERE'S PLENTY TO TELL--

-- BUT THIS ISN'T EXACTLY A SOCIAL CALL.

ALTHOUGH IT IS GOOD TO HEAR YOUR VOICE AGAIN, CHUM, I WANTED TO UP-DATE THE AVENGERS ON WHAT LITTLE WE'VE ACCOM-PLISHED HERE.

HANK AND I HAVE FAILED TO PENETRATE THE DOOR SO FAR, I'M SORRY TO SAY...

... BUT I INTEND TO SCRUTINIZE ONE OF THE COBBLED SECURITY SENSORS PIECE-BY-PIECE BEFORE LEAVING.

WE SHOULD BE THERE WITH YOU, OLD FRIEND.

I CANNOT ESCAPE THE SHAME OF OUR IGNOBLE RETREAT, PARTICULARLY IN THE WAKE OF DUAL MURDERS MOST FOUL.

BUT IT DOES BRING TO MIND THE WARNING DELIVERED BY A YOUNG BLOND WOMAN IN CENTRAL PARK RECENTLY, AT ONCE BOTH FAMILIAR YET STRANGE--

WARNING!?

FROM A YOUNG BLOND...

THANKS FOR THE SUGGESTION, HERC.

I MADE NO SUCH--

GOOD NIGHT.

KLIK

IN THE QUIET HOURS BEFORE DAWN...

TEK TEK

... FINGERS FLASH FEVERISHLY ACROSS A COMPUTER CONSOLE, PROBING FOR PATTERNS WHERE NONE ARE OBVIOUS, FIGURES WHERE NONE HAVE FORMED.

CAN'T GET THE DEMI-GOD'S WORDS OUT OF MY HEAD.

HIS DESCRIPTION OF A GIRL THAT COULD EASILY MATCH THE VISION I SAW*— OR THOUGHT I SAW— BEFORE MY...

... BEFORE MY...

... MY BLACKOUT.

TEK TEK

FINALLY FOUND A PLACE TO START THE INQUIRY, AT LEAST. A STRIP OF THE SECURITY-TAPE DAMAGED BY SOME TYPE OF HIGH-FREQUENCY INTERFERENCE.

*LAST ISSUE. --NEL

TEK

TEK

ALL BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO RECREATE THE IMAGE UNDERNEATH COMPLETELY...

... UNLESS I ENHANCE EACH AND EVERY QUADRANT PIXEL BY INDIVIDUAL PIXEL.

TEK

STORM SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO INTERRUPT THE POWER LIKE THAT, BUT I'LL WORRY ABOUT IT LATER...

TEK TEK

KRAK

BOOM

TEK TEK

... THE RESOLUTION'S COMING INTO FOCUS ALREADY.

THAT'S MARILLA, ALL RIGHT-- THE INHUMAN NURSE WHO LOOKED AFTER LITTLE LUNA, PIETRO AND CRYSTAL'S DAUGHTER---

-- AND THE LAST FACE SHE EVER SAW, IN ALL LIKELIHOOD.

JUST A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL I CAN BUILD A BETTER PICTURE OF THE KILLER.

TEK TEK

BUT I CAN'T HELP FEARING WHAT I'M ABOUT TO FIND.

PROOF POSITIVE OF A VICIOUS MURDER IN MY CHILDHOOD HOME, BY ONE OF MY OWN GUESTS--

-- MAYBE EVEN A COLLEAGUE I ONCE TRUSTED WITH MY VERY LIFE...?

POOR WOMAN'S OBVIOUSLY TERRIFIED.

ALMOST AS IF SHE SOMEHOW SENSES WHAT'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN...

... AND IS EQUALLY SURE THE HAND OF FATE CAN'T BE STOPPED.

TEK

KRAKA BOOM

NOT AGAIN.

ELECTRICAL OUTAGE CAN'T LAST THIS LONG...

... UNLESS THE BACK-UP GENERATORS ARE ALSO DOWN.

BUT THAT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN. EVER.

THERE ARE TOO MANY FAIL-SAFES IN PLACE FOR...

... IT CAN'T BE.

IT CAN'T BE!

AND ONCE AGAIN-- BEFORE HE CAN EVEN FIND THE STRENGTH TO SCREAM---

HANG ON.

I'M FINALLY GETTING THROUGH THE STATIC ON THE SCREEN, THE MURDERER'S IDENTITY CLEARING BEFORE MY--

NO, NO...

TEK TEK

-- THE LIGHTS GO OUT FOR THE TIRED AND TESTED TONY STARK...

... FROM WITHOUT AND WITHIN.

WHAT COULD WELL BE DAYS, MONTHS, OR EVEN YEARS-- BUT IS ACTUALLY LITTLE MORE THAN AN HOUR-- LATER...

...THE DARKNESS LIFTS LIKE A CLOUD.

BUT THE STORM HAS NOT YET PASSED.

AT FIRST, HE SEES ONLY THE FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS.

BLACK-AND-WHITE PORTRAITS OF THE AVENGERS ASSEMBLED-- FRIENDS AND FAMILY BOTH-- THEN AND NOW, TELLING A LIFETIME OF STORIES.

NEXT HE BECOMES AWARE OF THE REST OF THE ROOM, UNFAMILIAR AT FIRST IN THE SHADOWS OF MUTED MOONLIGHT.

HENRY PYM'S QUARTERS.

AND ONE SINGLE COLOR FINALLY BREAKS THROUGH THE SHADES OF GREY...

...THE COLOR OF BLOOD.

HANK--!?

LORD, NO...!

BODY'S STILL WARM, BUT HIS PULSE--

I'M TOO LATE--

-- TOO LATE--

-- HE'S DEAD...

THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING.

ANOTHER MURDER RIGHT UNDER MY NOSE.

RIGHT HERE IN MY OWN HOME.

I CAN'T FIND A PULSE.

BUT IT ENDS TONIGHT, HERE AND NOW.

HANK WILL BE AVENGED.

NO SIGN OF A STRUGGLE. MEANS THE ASSASSIN MUST HAVE SURPRISED HIM IN HIS SLEEP, OR...

OR IT WAS SOMEONE HE KNEW.

KILLER COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN FAR YET. POWER'S STILL DOWN THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE...

... BUT MY ARMOR'S SENSORS WILL EASILY—

LOOK TO *YOURSELF*, DEAREST TONY!

SHRRK

UFF

LOOK TO YOURSELF, *DEVIL!*

MARIANNE...

... MARIANNE RODGERS!?

DIDN'T YOU *MISS* ME, HONEY...?

H-HOW COULD YOU--

LEARNED A LOT OF NEW TRICKS IN THE ASYLUM, DARLING. FOUND MYSELF WITH QUITE A BIT OF *TIME* ON MY HANDS...

... THANKS TO THE BLOOD ON *YOURS*.

WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT?

-- I'VE BEEN IN YOUR UGLY LITTLE MIND!

MY PEOPLE WERE ONLY TRYING TO *HELP* YOU, MARIANNE, YOU KNOW THAT. YOUR BURGEONING *TELEPATHY* WAS OUT OF CONTROL, SLOWLY DRIVING YOU CRAZY...

DON'T *LIE* TO ME, TONY, NOT ANYMORE--

-- PLEASE--

I KNOW YOU *BETTER* THAN YOU KNOW YOURSELF, DEARHEART.

AND THAT'S THE TRUTH THAT DROVE ME OVER THE EDGE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

THE *BLACK STAIN* ON YOUR BRAIN SPILLING OVER INTO MINE, DROP BY SLIMY DROP. SEEPING THROUGH DEFENSES I NEVER EVEN KNEW I HAD.

TELEKINESIS--!?

RAW, UNFOCUSED...

... BUT UNDENIABLY POWERFUL.

I KNOW EVERY INCH OF THIS HOUSE BLINDFOLDED, INSIDE AND OUT. ONLY CHANCE IS TO TRY AND USE THE DARKNESS TO MY ADVANTAGE BEFORE--

THINK AGAIN, TONY.

YOU CAN RUN...

... BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE FROM A TELEPATH!

YEAARGH--!

TOO MUCH TIME IN *YOUR* HEAD STARTED IT ALL FOR ME, SWEETIE, SO I RETREATED INTO MY OWN...

ZR

HAK

... WITH THE ALL-TOO-WILLING "HELP" OF YOUR SO-CALLED DOCTORS, OF COURSE.

BUT NOW THAT THEIR DAMNABLE *DRUGS* HAVE FINALLY *WORN OFF--*

-- I COULDN'T *WAIT* TO SHOW YOU WHAT I *FOUND* INSIDE!

SHE'S COMPLETELY INSANE.

FEELS LIKE SHE SEVERED HALF MY CALF MUSCLES WITH THAT LAST PSI-BEAM. PAIN'S INTENSE, LOSING BLOOD BY THE BUCKET...

... HAVE TO IMPROVISE AN ESCAPE ROUTE FAST.

ALL THE TIMES JARVIS SCOLDED ME FOR THIS AS A CHILD, HE COULDN'T HAVE GUESSED IT MIGHT SAVE MY LIFE SOMEDAY--

IT WON'T.

I'VE ONLY BEEN TOYING WITH YOU SO FAR, LOVER. JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS TOGETHER, A TOUCH OF TEASING TO INCREASE THE ANTICIPATION...

... BEFORE WE RUSH TO THE GRAND CLIMAX.

UHNN

IN THE END, STUDLEY...

IRON MAN ARMOR'S RIGHT THERE, SO CLOSE--

AND YET SO FAR.

YOU CAN LOOK...

... BUT YOU CAN'T TOUCH.

SLAM

BELIEVE ME, TONY-- JUST LIKE I BELIEVED YOU FOR SO MANY YEARS--

-- I REALLY AM DOING THIS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD!

KRZZZK

... EVEN YOU CAN'T OUTRACE THE SPEED OF THOUGHT.

NOOO!

TONY STARK WILL *NOT* DIE BY YOUR HAND, MAD-WOMAN--

WHOUUH...

-- WHILE *MASQUE* LIVES!

MERE MOMENTS LATER...

UHNN

... DR. HENRY PYM AWAKENS, SURPRISINGLY UNSCATHED, FROM A DREAM HE'LL NEVER FORGET.

... WHAT HAPPENED HERE--?!

TONY--?

TONY...

TO A NIGHTMARE THAT'S BARELY BEGUN...

CONTINUES IN FORCE WORKS #17 AND AVENGERS #392...! AND IN IRON MAN #322-- THE ULTIMATE BATTLE FOR TONY STARK TAKES OFF...!